

~~SECRET~~

[REDACTED]  
Dissemination Authorized  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

4 June 1951

25X1

[REDACTED]  
Copy No 25

25X1

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Document No.	11
No Change In Class.	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Declassified	
Class. Changed To:	TS S C
Auth:	HK 70-2
Date:	20 July 78
By:	[REDACTED]

25X1

Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

~~SECRET~~

Intelligence Memorandum

Subject: French National Elections

On 17 June 1951, for the first time in almost five years, elections will be held to fill all the seats in the French National Assembly. These elections are important to US security interests because the vote is expected to reflect the popular attitude toward the policies of the current pro-Western middle-of-the-road "Third Force" government, and the election results will determine the political orientation of the country which is the keystone in the NATO European defense system.

Fifteen political organizations have filed application to qualify as national parties. Most of these parties except the two extremes, the Communists (PCF) and De Gaulle's Rally of the French People (RPF), can be divided into two main groups. One is the remnant of the "Third Force." This consists of the Socialists (SFIO), the Popular Republicans (MRP), and the Radical Socialists. Their position will be somewhat weakened, however, by the newly formed "Fourth Force" in which a number of Rightist-oriented splinter groups, including some formerly associated with the "Third Force," have united in a coalition reminiscent of the traditional right wing of the Third Republic. In addition, a large number of candidates with no party affiliations have filed.

The election law which was finally accepted by the Assembly early in May was proposed specifically to limit Communist representation in the new Assembly. If all the non-Communist parties united to apply the electoral alliance provisions of the law, the Communist delegation in the Assembly would be reduced to a negligible fraction. This possibility has been eliminated by De Gaulle's injunction against affiliations generally, and by the Socialists' specific denunciation of pre-election alliances with the Gaullists. Complete across-the-board alliances from the Socialists to the "Fourth Force" right wing are out of the question because of such local problems as support for church schools and national economic issues on such points as government control of industry. De Gaulle has grudgingly accepted a limited number of alliances, but on the whole the RPF will form no electoral alliances. De Gaulle's policy has nevertheless obliged the "Fourth Force" to seek alliances to the left, and the middle-of-the-road parties have therefore succeeded in forming substantially more electoral alliances than had been expected.

- 2 -

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

The greatest threat to US security would come from a government formed by the Communist Party (PCF), which would pledge France to repudiate NATO. As a result of the 1946 national elections, the PCF emerged as the largest political party in France, with 27 percent of the votes cast. From then until the fall of 1950, however, Communist strength seemed to be on the wane. The elections for the Council of the Republic in 1948 and the cantonal elections in 1949 indicated a revival of more conservative influence, and the disillusionment of former Communist sympathizers following the outbreak of the Korean War further reduced PCF support. Increasing popular recognition of the extent of PCF domination by the USSR has accentuated the gradual swing to the right. Recently the incipient deviationist movement in France has caused considerable concern among PCF leaders, but its electoral effect is not expected to be very great.

On the other hand, the ability of the non-Communists to limit PCF representation by means of the new electoral law now is open to question. Rising living costs since September 1950 and skillful leadership in the CGT assure the PCF a majority of working class votes, many of which would probably traditionally go to the Communists in any event. Moreover, the Communist "Peace Campaign" has undoubtedly influenced many neutralist-minded Frenchmen to support the PCF. A more important element of Communist strength at the polls may be the abstention from voting, which in 1946 amounted to 20 percent, on the part of those who are disgusted with the political maneuvering of the recent Assembly, or of those who remain apathetic toward political issues. If the disciplined PCF can muster 5 to 6 million votes, it is quite possible that almost a third of those voting, out of 24.5 million eligible, could be Communist. There are indications, however, that conservative elements plan to increase the non-Communist vote in critical electoral districts by controlling absenteeism. Moreover, the relatively broad middle-of-the-road affiliations now arranged probably will hurt the PCF sufficiently to offset a fairly substantial popular vote, although the party representation in the new Assembly may not be much less than the 180 seats the Communists controlled in the retiring Assembly.

De Gaulle's policy prohibiting affiliations is deliberately calculated to build up Communist as well as RPF representation at the expense of the Center. This is an election trick to force middle-of-the-road elements to look on the RPF as the lesser of two evils. If De Gaulle returns to power, French relations with the US would probably be slightly less amicable than at present. The government would probably be more stable, the military effort would be expanded, and French international interests would be more jealously protected. However, labor's

~~SECRET~~

resistance to a Rightist economic program might seriously jeopardize the regime, if the PCF did not cripple it first, through strikes, sabotage and armed resistance.

Despite the intransigent stand taken by De Gaulle, if election results offer the possibility of a coalition government with elements to the right of the Socialists he may be willing to make some concessions. At the moment, it seems fairly certain that the more liberal elements of the Centrist coalition, particularly the MRP, will lose considerable support in view of the current trend to the right. The Socialists seem less sure now of retaining their present representation, especially since the PCF may hold its following. The extent of "Fourth Force" strength is therefore a vital factor in determining the composition of the new Assembly. If this rightist group can rally enough support to block RPF aspirations, it may be possible to form a government only slightly to the right of the retiring coalition. On the other hand, if the rightist voters who would normally follow the "Fourth Force" balk at the affiliations to which the new group has agreed, De Gaulle's strategy may prove successful. However, if the RPF can secure no more than 50 percent of the 314 seats necessary to control the Assembly, De Gaulle's more realistic advisers can be expected to prevail on the General to reduce his demands for an expanded military program. He might be expected, moreover, to forego his desire for immediate constitutional reform to provide for an executive with powers similar to those of the President of the US. De Gaulle will undoubtedly insist on limiting local Communist capabilities and on obtaining greater recognition for France in the international field, as well as additional guarantees of US aid on the continent. While there is as yet little indication that De Gaulle will compromise on his program, the possibility is not to be discounted.

In the event the Center after obtaining a majority is unable to reach an understanding, attempts will undoubtedly be made to broaden the coalition base by including the RPF. Even in the midst of the electoral campaign, the Center parties are careful to explain to their supporters that affiliations do not imply surrender of any principles or programs that conflict with those of their affiliation partners. Therefore, although it now appears unlikely that the Gaullists and the Communists can obtain a majority between them, there is no guarantee that the Center, if in a position to form the government, will be able to agree on a program after the elections.

- 4 -

~~SECRET~~